

Jane F. Harman

1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

1993–1999; 2001–



Image courtesy of the Member

JANE HARMAN WON ELECTION TO THE HOUSE of Representatives in 1992, the landmark “Year of the Woman.” Harman has become a leading figure in Congress on defense issues as a member of the Select Committee on Intelligence and the Committee on Homeland Security. In 2001, after leaving Congress for a term in an unsuccessful run for California governor, Harman won re-election to her old seat, joining a handful of women to serve nonconsecutive terms in Congress.

Jane Margaret Lakes was born in New York City on June 28, 1945, to Adolph N. Lakes and Lucille Geier. Raised in Los Angeles, she graduated from University High School in 1962. After earning a B.A. in government from Smith College in 1966, she received a J.D. from Harvard Law School three years later.¹ She married Richard Frank and worked for two years at a Washington, D.C., law firm before joining the staff of California Senator John V. Tunney in 1972. In 1975 she was appointed chief counsel and staff director of the Senate Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights. She served as deputy secretary to the Cabinet of President James Earl “Jimmy” Carter in 1977 and as a special counsel to the Department of Defense. In 1980 she divorced Richard Frank and later married Sidney Harman, the founder of a major audio electronics company. Over the next decade, Jane Harman worked as a corporate lawyer and as a director of her husband’s multimillion dollar company. The Harmans have four children: Daniel, Justine, Brian, and Hilary.

In 1992, Harman first pursued elective office when she ran for a congressional seat in southern California. In the general election, she faced Republican Joan Milke Flores, a Los Angeles city councilwoman, and three minority party candidates. Harman employed a socially liberal but fiscally conservative message on her way to a 48 to 42 percent victory against Flores.

In Congress Harman served as a watch guard of the high-tech defense industry that resided in her district. From her seat on the influential Armed Services Committee (later renamed the National Security Committee) she kept the Los Angeles air force base off the list of post-Cold War closings. Despite a sharp decline in defense spending, Representative Harman steered lucrative military weapons and space defense projects into her district. Yet she also prodded the industry at home to retool for a peacetime economy. As a member of the Science Committee, with a seat on the Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee, Harman brought work to companies looking for nonmilitary projects. She said, "I have viewed it as a major part of my job to help my district transition from defense-dependence, which was a deadend strategy, to the robust diverse economy which it now enjoys."²

In 1994, running in one of the most evenly divided districts in the country, Harman nearly became a victim of the "Republican Revolution." She pulled out a thin 812-vote win against her Republican opponent, Susan Brooks. When Harman faced Brooks again in 1996, in an election that became a referendum on the Republican "Contract with America," she won by 19,000 votes. Subsequent races bore out the contention that neither party could dominate the competitive southern California district.³

Harman's record in Congress straddled the ideological middle ground that her district occupied. She cast her vote for President William J Clinton's 1993 budget, which increased spending and taxes, but by 1996, she advocated spending cuts, the balanced budget amendment, and the line-item veto. In 1995, Congresswoman Harman co-authored the Deficit Reduction Lockbox, requiring that spending cuts be applied to the deficit. She voted against the North American Free Trade Agreement but backed the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Harman favored pro-choice measures and a partial ban on semiautomatic weapons but also supported the death penalty.

In 1998, Harman declined to run for a fourth consecutive term in the House to pursue the Democratic nomination for governor of California. She lost in the Democratic primary.⁴ Harman reclaimed her House seat by narrowly defeating her congressional successor, Republican Steve Kuykendall, in the 2000 general election. In the 107th Congress (2001–2003), Harman received assignments on the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, a nod to her experience and continued influence. Shortly thereafter, she was promoted to Ranking Member of the Intelligence Committee. In the 2002 elections, she defeated GOP candidate Stuart Johnson with 61 percent of the vote. She won election to the 109th Congress (2005–2007) in 2004 by defeating Republican Paul Whitehead by a 62 to 34 percent margin.⁵

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Jane F. Harman," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts), The Sophia Smith Collection. *Papers*: 1993–1998, 151 linear feet. Restricted access.

NOTES

- 1 *Politics in America*, 2004 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2003): 136.
- 2 Paul Jacobs, "Defense Firms Were Key Donors to Harman Races; Gubernatorial Candidate Says She Backed Industry in Congress to Protect Jobs in South Bay," 11 May 1998, *Los Angeles Times*: A1.
- 3 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.
- 4 Cathleen Decker, "Showdown for Davis, Lungren: Voters Reject Millionaires Checchi and Harman in State's First Blanket Primary," 3 June 1998, *Los Angeles Times*: A1; Cathleen Decker and Mark Barabak, "Davis' 4th-1st Comeback 'Proved Pundits Wrong,'" 5 June 1998, *Los Angeles Times*: A1.
- 5 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.